VATICAN NEWS

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Doctrinal Note on Marian titles: Mother of the faithful, not Co-redemptrix

The document of the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, approved by Pope Leo XIV, offers clarifications on titles applied to the Blessed Virgin Mary, and calls for special attention to the use of the expression, "Mediatrix of all graces."

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The Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith on Tuesday, 4 November 2025, published ***Mater populi fidelis*** ("The Mother of the Faithful People"), a Doctrinal Note "On Some Marian Titles Regarding Mary's Cooperation in the Work of Salvation." Signed by the Prefect, Cardinal Víctor Manuel Fernández, and the Secretary for the Dicastery's Doctrinal Section, Monsignor Armando Matteo, the Note was approved by the Pope on 7 October.

Mater populi fidelis (MPF) is the fruit of a long and complex collegial effort. It is a doctrinal document on Marian devotion, centred on the figure of Mary, who is associated with the work of Christ as Mother of believers. The Note provides a significant biblical foundation for devotion to Mary, as well as marshalling various contributions from the Fathers, the Doctors of the Church, elements of Eastern tradition, and the thought of recent Popes.

In this positive framework, the doctrinal text analyses a number of Marian titles, encouraging the adoption of some of those appellations and warning against the use of others. Titles such as "Mother of Believers," "Spiritual Mother," "Mother of the Faithful" are noticed with approval in the Note. Conversely, the title of "Co-redemptrix" is deemed inappropriate and problematic. The title of "Mediatrix" is considered unacceptable when it takes on a meaning that excludes Jesus Christ; however, it can used appropriately so long as it expresses an inclusive and participatory mediation that glorifies the power of Christ. The titles "Mother of Grace" and "Mediatrix of All Graces" are considered acceptable when used in a very precise sense, but the document also warns of particularly broad explanations of the meaning of the terms.

Essentially, the Note reaffirms Catholic doctrine, which has always emphasised that everything in Mary is directed towards the centrality of Christ and His salvific work. For this reason, even if some Marian titles admit of an orthodox interpretation through correct exegesis, *Mater populi fidelis* says it is preferable to avoid them.

In his presentation of the Doctrinal Note, Cardinal Fernández expresses appreciation for popular devotion but warns against groups and publications that propose a certain dogmatic development and raise doubts among the faithful, including through social media. The main problem in interpreting these titles applied to Our Lady, he says concerns the way of understanding Mary's association with Christ's work of redemption (paragraph 3).

Co-redemptrix

Regarding the title "Co-redemptrix," the Note recalls that "some Popes have used the title "without elaborating much on its meaning." Generally, it continues, "they have presented the title in two specific ways: in reference to Mary's divine motherhood (insofar as she, as Mother, made possible the Redemption that Christ accomplished) or in reference to her union with Christ at the redemptive Cross. The Second Vatican Council refrained from using the title for dogmatic, pastoral, and ecumenical reasons. Saint John Paul II referred to Mary as 'Co-redemptrix' on at least seven occasions, particularly relating this title to the salvific value of our sufferings when they are offered together with the sufferings of Christ, to whom Mary is united especially at the Cross" (18).

The document cites an internal discussion within the then-Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, which in February 1996 had discussed the request to proclaim a new dogma on Mary as "Co-redemptrix or Mediatrix of all graces." Then-Cardinal Joseph

Ratzinger was opposed to such a definition, arguing, "the precise meaning of these titles is not clear, and the doctrine contained in them is not mature. [...] It is not clear how the doctrine expressed in these titles is present in Scripture and the apostolic tradition."

Later, in 2002, the future Benedict XVI expressed himself publicly in the same way: "The formula 'Co-redemptrix' departs to too great an extent from the language of Scripture and of the Fathers and therefore gives rise to misunderstandings... Everything comes from Him [Christ], as the Letter to the Ephesians and the Letter to the Colossians, in particular, tell us; Mary, too, is everything that she is through Him. The word 'Co-redemptrix' would obscure this origin."

The note clarifies that Cardinal Ratzinger did not deny the good intentions behind the proposal, nor the valuable aspects reflected in it, but nonetheless maintained that they were "being expressed in the wrong way" (19).

Pope Francis also expressed his clear opposition to the use of the title Co-Redemptrix on at least three occasions.

Tuesday's Doctrinal Note concludes: "*It is always inappropriate* to use the title 'Co-redemptrix' to define Mary's cooperation. This title risks obscuring Christ's unique salvific mediation and can therefore create confusion and an imbalance in the harmony of the truths of the Christian faith. [...] When an expression requires many, repeated explanations to prevent it from straying from a correct meaning, it does not serve the faith of the People of God and becomes *unhelpful*" (22).

Mediatrix

The Note emphasises that "the biblical statement about Christ's exclusive mediation is conclusive. Christ is the only Mediator" (24).

At the same time, MPF recognises "the fact that the word 'mediation' is commonly used in many areas of everyday life, where it is understood simply as cooperation, assistance, or intercession. As a result, it is inevitable that the term would be applied to Mary in a subordinate sense. Used in this way, it does not intend to add any efficacy or power to the unique mediation of Jesus Christ, true God and true man" (25).

Further, "it is clear that Mary has a real mediatory role in enabling the Incarnation of the Son of God in our humanity" (26).

Mother of believers and Mediatrix of all graces

Mary's maternal role "in no way obscures or diminishes" the unique mediation of Christ, "but rather shows its power [...] Understood in this way, Mary's motherhood does not seek to weaken the unique adoration due to Christ alone but, rather, seeks to enkindle it."

Therefore, the Note states, "one must avoid titles and expressions that present Mary as a kind of 'lightning rod' before the Lord's justice, as if she were a necessary alternative before the insufficiency of God's mercy" (37b).

Thus, the title “Mother of Believers” “enables us to speak of Mary’s role in our relation to our life of grace”. However, MPF goes on to urge caution concerning the use of expressions that may convey “less acceptable notions” (45).

“Cardinal Ratzinger already affirmed” for example, “that the title ‘Mary, Mediatrix of All Graces’ was not clearly grounded in Revelation.” So, the Note continues, “in line with this conviction, we can recognize the difficulties this title poses, both in terms of theological reflection and spirituality” (45). In fact, “no human person — not even the Apostles or the Blessed Virgin — can act as a universal dispenser of grace. Only God can bestow grace, and he does so through the humanity of Christ” (53).

“Some titles, such as ‘Mediatrix of All Graces,’ have limits that do not favour a correct understanding of Mary’s unique place,” MPF explains, adding, “In fact, she, the first redeemed, could not have been the mediatrix of the grace that she herself received” (67).

Nonetheless, the Doctrinal Note acknowledges that “the term ‘graces,’ when seen in reference to Mary’s maternal help at various moments in our lives, can have an acceptable meaning. The plural form expresses all the aids — even material — that the Lord may grant us when He heeds His Mother’s intercession” (68).

Read the full text of Mater populi fidelis.

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